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Musical Fusion in the Works of Olaf Stapledon: A Matrix of Storms and Stars

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THE WORKS OF OLAF STAPLEDON OFFER UTOPIAN MUSICAL UNIVERSES OF RICH metaphor and beauty that transport readers through time and space, much the way the protagonist of Stapledon's most famous work, *Star Maker*, is transported up into the starry skies of night and through galaxies while stepping outside of his house on the Wirral Peninsula. This essay is an analysis of how the English philosopher and science fiction writer treated the interconnections between music and metaphor in his major creative writings, with an emphasis on his philosophy of music in the human condition and on music as a context for worlds outside of human existence. Stapledon fuses musical metaphor to his imaginative vision essentially in two ways: the first is his use of music terminology itself as analogy and metaphor in the foreground, on the surface of his fiction; the second is his evocation of music in the deeper dimensional levels of his fiction, where networks of metaphorical relationships about music arise in the expanse of his worlds and where he preserves music as a reliquary for his most profound thoughts and suspended moments of contemplation on creativity and time.

I present these relationships in context of elements of music: rhythm, pitch, dynamics, timbre, and form. I have overlaid my analysis with two levels of metaphor: simple (foreground) and complex (background). Simple metaphor refers to Stapledon's references to music and music terminology that appear in the foreground, on the surface of his texts. Complex metaphor refers to and reveals how Stapledon's intuitive understanding of music is embedded in the background of his conceptions and how his creative thought process resembles that of a composer. Taken all together, this study of musical metaphor on the foreground and background levels in his fiction shows "the extent to which the metaphor affords new ways of seeing" (Prieto 23). Similarly, the metaphorical levels I have established in this essay can be

viewed as examples of "discriminating between different levels of description, without any fixed correlation with belief or imagination" (Cumming 52). I also approach my analysis bearing this in mind: "Metaphor is actually as difficult to define as imagination, perhaps because it is also an expression of creativity" (Spitzer 3).

Stapledon's interest in music was evident throughout his life. He learned to sing in childhood and was playing the violin at age seventeen (Crossley, *Speaking for the Future* 56). Olaf and his wife, Agnes Z. Stapledon, attended symphony and chamber concerts in and around Liverpool. Many of these concerts were given by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the Holyoke Chamber Music Society. According to John Stapledon (the son of Olaf and Agnes) Holyoke "regularly booked some of the foremost ensembles in the country" (Stapledon, John, 17 July 2003). Olaf and Agnes befriended Colin Kitchin, who was the principal violist of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic for some years. Agnes's father played the cello; she played the piano and her sister played the violin. Agnes was a life-long member of the English Folk Song and Dance Society (founded by Cecil Sharp). Both Olaf and Agnes were members of the Sandon Club, in Liverpool's famous Bluecoat Chambers, which was a popular meeting place for the artistic and intellectual community of the area. Agnes also knew Hepzibah Menuhin, though that friendship was not a musical one: they were both active in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In his 17 July 2003 letter to me, John Stapledon also wrote of music-making in the Stapledon home: "We all played recorders of different shapes and sizes and spent many happy evenings struggling through arrangements of Baroque music." These musical experiences at home and at concert hall events were later reflected in different ways throughout Stapledon's fiction. Sometimes, as in the four major novels (*Last and First Men*, *Star Maker*, *Odd John*, and *Sirius*), Stapledon's reverence for music finds expression as the soul of a protagonist, the longing of a species, even a glorious cosmos created solely of music.

In addition to Stapledon's early musical experiences at home he had a professional encounter late in life with the composer Dmitry Shostakovich. The meeting occurred when Stapledon visited America as the sole British delegate to attend the Cultural and Scientific Conference on World Peace, which was held from 25-27 March 1949 at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York. That event was also the first visit to America for Shostakovich. Both men gave presentations at the conference; Shostakovich also played a keyboard transcription of the Scherzo from his Fifth Symphony. Although Stapledon and Shostakovich shared venues during the controversial event and while their intersecting may have been the one significant association Stapledon had with a major composer during his lifetime, their meeting had no influence on Stapledon's work because Stapledon's major novels had been published before he

met Shostakovich and because Stapledon lived only eighteen months beyond the meeting.

References to music and the use of music terminology appear often in Stapledon's writings. He uses these words, terms, analogies and metaphors to create a sense of movement, dynamics, tone and register which, at important points in the narratives, give meaning to his ideas. While these surface events are not necessarily essential to the deeper metaphorical levels embedded in his fiction, their articulation responds to the immediate needs of Stapledon's narratives. These foreground musical metaphors provide contour and set apart from the surrounding narrative the thoughts being expressed, as if the musical metaphor itself can be perceived as a separate entity. The surface metaphors also possess a spontaneous quality and are significant in that they resemble the impulsive gestures of music **improvisation ~ the** metaphors vary from simple invocations to profound, sometimes startling statements. I have selected examples from Stapledon's works that show a broad spectrum of these surface metaphors, and I present them as an overture to the deeper musical contexts and themes that follow later in this essay.

1. *A Man Divided*: "Each of us was a musical instrument for the other to play on in the sex duet" (22); "And tone of voice! Like fingers rippling all over the keys of one's emotions" (22).
2. "A World of Sound": "Just as we see things as near and far through the significance of colour and perspective, so in this strange world, certain characters of timbre of harmonics, of overtones, conveyed a sense of 'nearness'; others a sense of 'distance'" (245).
3. *Last and First Men*: "Then suddenly the whole world would burst asunder to the horizon, leaving the sky open for the quartets, duets and solos of the most brilliant stars of flight" (79); "For, in a species in which the lower functions were so strictly disciplined under the higher, the long-drawn-out spiritual disaster had actually begun to take effect upon the germ-plasm; so that individuals were doomed before birth to lassitude, and to mentality in a minor key" (192); "In spite of the great diversity of this span of man's history, it is a single movement within the whole symphony, just as the careers of the First and Second Men are each a single movement" (197); "And for the readers of this book, who are themselves tremors in the opening bars of music, it is best that I should dwell chiefly on things near to them, even at the cost of ignoring much that is in fact greater" (292); "Very much of it would be incomprehensible to terrestrials, and much of it repeats again and again, in the many Neptunian modes, themes that

we have already observed in the Terrestrial or the Venerian movements of the human symphony" (292); "But in the vast music of existence the actual theme of mankind now ceases forever" (343).

4. *Last Men in London*: "My glory is, not to preserve myself, but to create upon the strings of myself the music that is spirit, in whatever degree of excellence I may; and to appreciate that music in myself and others, and in the massed splendors of the cosmos, with whatever insight I can muster" (249).
5. "Letters to the Future": "Man's career has indeed been a fugue whose theme (the birth, struggle, triumph and eclipse of successive ideals), has been repeated in endless variety" (110).
6. *Nebula Maker*: "With the nebulae the conflict was always at bottom an esthetic conflict between the individual dance rhythm and the social dance rhythm" (58); "I became sensitive to the perceptual harmonies and discords between the private dance rhythms of diverse individuals" (59); "The cosmos should become a lovely pattern of distinct minuet figures" (110).
7. *Odd John*: "Speech was but an obbligato to the real theme" (243).
8. *The Opening of the Eyes*: "Or do souls, here tempered, serve here alone, as instruments in the cosmical music? Or do they, after death, take part in some post-mortal orchestra, that plays more difficult, more brilliant music, inconceivable to man?" (38); "Henceforth the mere deaf instrument must forever be teased by phantoms of the music that it cannot hear" (90).
9. *Sirius*: "The music of our two lives is a duet of variations upon three themes" (144-145).
10. *Star Maker*: "I glanced heedlessly at many star couples, trios, and quartets, in which more or less equal partners waltz in close union" (23); "I will only say that here as elsewhere we found all the cultural themes known on earth, but that in this world of mobile plants all was transposed into a strange key, a perplexing mode" (124).

While Stapledon's use of music analogy and metaphor is so rich, it is worth noting that he mentions but six composers in all of his fiction; four of them are twentieth century composers. The six composers are Johann Sebastian Bach,

Ludwig van Beethoven, Arthur Bliss, Gustav Holst, Igor Stravinsky, and Ralph Vaughan Williams. There is one mention of the American composer Edward MacDowell in Stapledon's 28 July 1918 letter to Agnes; he wrote of hearing MacDowell's songs "Sea Pieces" and "To a Wild Rose" (Crossley, *Talking Across the World* 316). (Also mentioned in the letters to and from Agnes are Johannes Brahms, Frederyk Chopin, Claude Debussy, Gilbert and Sullivan, Edvard Grieg, George Frederick Handel, Franz Liszt, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky.) The novel *Last Men in London* includes a reference to the entire Bach family: The Neptunian narrator, while telling how he came to inhabit the mind of the protagonist Paul, says, "In the Seventeenth Century there was a German family which promised what I wanted; but in them the desirable features were complicated by a musical sensitivity which in many individuals afforded escape from the conflict" (64). Stapledon seems to have had a high regard for the German music tradition; in *Darkness and the Light* he wrote "The Germans still gave the world great music" (132). Musical instruments he mentions are bells (church bells and others—the action of the novel *Star Maker* takes place between two tolls of a church bell at midnight), the harpsichord, recorder, street organ, trumpet, violin, and the human voice. Stapledon refers to the symphony orchestra in many places (not just in his fiction), sometimes in deeply thoughtful ways, such as in this example: "In the orchestra of the human race the different players come in at different times to play their parts, and then go out again, never to return. But the orchestra as a whole goes on playing, and the music goes on. In some millions of years it will probably end. The music will be finished. This will not matter, if it has been a beautiful thing brought to a fitting end" (*An Outline* 707).

Complex musical metaphors in the deeper levels and structures of Stapledon's works occur and vary continuously. The short story, "A World of Sound," treats elements of music as living organisms in an environment of sound—a place where a multitude of timbres go far beyond those of acoustic instruments. The timbral world Stapledon created here preceded electronic music (sound synthesized electronically) by at least a decade, if the 1948 *musique concrete* studies of the French sound engineer Pierre Schaeffer, the 1951 founding of both the West-deutscher Rundfunk (WDR) studio in Cologne and the Columbia University Electronic Music Studio in New York City, and Lejaren Hiller's 1956 *Illiad Suite* are the chronological benchmarks. "A World of Sound" (1936) also served as the *protocosmos* for one or more of the musical universes in *Star Maker* (1937), in that it is a descriptive presentation of worlds referred to in the novel. The short story's imaginative conception is found in *Last and First Men* (1930) where the Second Men tell a children's story about "how a brave young tune slew cacophonous beasts and won a melodious bride

in that strange country where the landscape is all of sound and all living things are music" (*Last and First Men* 136-137).

The environment of "A World of Sound" is presented in music terminology but with elements of music—pitch, rhythm, dynamics, timbre—imbued with organic life, and functioning as sentient groups of beings and individuals. The registral expanse of this world goes beyond the range of human hearing and features a richness absent from music created by human beings. The living organisms consist of sounds, sound-figures, coherent musical forms, and musical objects that fluctuate across scales with elaborate detail. They are alive and intelligent. Unlike Ayn Rand's theory of art—"Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgements" (19)—the organisms do not re-create reality but are alive in real time: "Then I reminded myself that this music was not merely telling but actually living its story. In fact it was not art but life" ("A World of Sound" 244). Their lives are comparable to this description of a musical phrase as an organic life form:

The phrase might even be heard to objectify a life force disembodied from an agency—a force of will or desire, perhaps. Regardless of the problem of individuation, the metaphor of 'music as life' is a compelling one. It can even determine how one may relate to a musical work—as if it were an actual person. To anthropomorphize a tone is the first step to thinking of a concerto as an emperor, or an orchestral suite as a carnival of the animals. (Spitzer 12)

In his book *Harmony*, the seminal twentieth century music theorist Heinrich Schenker wrote about pitch (or tone) as having biological properties similar to those in Stapledon's short story:

Now what meaning are we to ascribe to "relationships" in the life of a tone, and how could the intensity of its self-expression be measured? The relationships of the tone are established in its systems. If the egotism of a tone expresses itself in the desire to dominate its fellow-tones rather than be dominated by them (in this respect, the tone resembles a human being), it is the system which offers to the tone the means to dominate and thus to satisfy its egotistic urge. A tone dominates the others if it subjects them to its superior vital force, within the relationship fixed in the various systems.... In this sense, a system resembles, in anthropomorphic terms, a constitution, regulation, statute, or whatever other name we use to grasp conceptually the manifold relationships we enter. (84)

The world of tones in "A World of Sound" is primarily two-dimensional, where pitch is equivalent to space, and timbre, to perspective. The beings are highly

animated, in constant movement, yet distinctive as individuals. They travel up and down scales causing ripples of sound and gesture that employ dissonance to avoid colliding when they encounter one another. The narrator of the story discovers he is one of these life-forms when he collides with others and experiences intense physical pain. He quickly learns how to navigate: "Similarly my movement up or down the musical scale appeared to me as a deepening or heightening of the pitch of all other objects" ("A World of Sound" 247). The narrator finds himself in a game, frolicking and pursuing sex with a sound-nymph: "And in the exquisite harmony of our two natures I imagined wonderful creative potentialities" ("A World of Sound" 247).

Rhythm becomes a clear feature of life in this world. It is characterized as *locomotion* and is compared to the nimble, limitless movements of lemurs but with space, pitch, and register taking on the effects of high altitude or deep fathoms from the human world, where traveling too far on either side of sea level becomes dangerous. In pursuing the nymph, the protagonist needs nourishment and eats other musical organisms along the way, which are then incorporated into his own harmonious form. As "A World of Sound" nears its end, the narrator reveals that the beast "reached me with one tentacle, one shrieking arpeggio," and "There, fangs and talons of sound tore me agonizingly limb from limb" (251). Then, Stapledon has the narrator waking up in a concert hall, realizing he had fallen asleep during the concert: the *world of sound* had been but a dream. The environment of sound and music presented in the short story is temporal, just as a dream is temporal: "For while music may, in effect, release emotions and encourage fantasy formations, it rarely persuades the listener...to adjust himself to a reality from which he had initially escaped to find solace in an imaginary world of sounds" (Aronson 71).

Stapledon's use of music analogy and metaphor reveal he thought about music not only in a philosophical context, but also in ways composers sometimes consider form (scale and size), content, style, and the processes employed in creating musical works. While the ideas about music he noted in some of his writings and the critical comments scholars have written about his works may not point to a use of elements from music composition associated with a given style or time period of music history, it is clear that the components of his prose, in and of themselves, show a mind replete with originality, invention, and drama. His use of musical metaphor displays an intellectual bent toward the sonic art as well as an innate understanding of how florid allusions to music in prose can glow to evoke profound expressions of beauty. Roger Scruton offers this definition of metaphor in music: "Music is the intentional object of an experience that only rational beings can have, and only through the exercise of imagination. To describe it we must have recourse to metaphor, not because music resides in an analogy with other things, but

because the metaphor describes exactly *what* we hear, when we hear sounds as music" (96).

The imaginative use of rhythm and pacing is evident throughout Stapledon's fiction. Movement in time—not only across the vast time scales of *Last and First Men*—but also compressed, as in the momentary time period of *Star Maker*, is a consistent element of form and content in his fiction. Stapledon wrote of being inspired by "the free rhythms of the Psalms" in his brief 1924 letter on poetry ("Rhyme"). The aperiodicity of rhythm and the relationship between rhythm and patterns of order in Stapledon's works exert larger organizing powers over the spans of his narratives.

Last and First Men, Stapledon's first novel, is a history of the future that covers humanity through two billion years and eighteen species. One species, the Second Men, is described as a *human symphony*. Another species, the Third Men, have acute hearing that enables them to run blind yet still avoid collisions. They establish a Holy Empire of Music, with a Prophet of Music who retires to perfect his art as "music of the wind, thunder, and waterfall" (207). That civilization combines music and religion to excess, and, after several thousand years, becomes a music theocracy. Rhythm plays an important role in their musical life: "Moreover the great range of sounds and rhythms had acquired an extremely subtle gamut of emotional significance. Music was therefore one of the main preoccupations of the civilizations of this species" (*Last and First Men* 199). The narrative technique used in this novel employs ellipses as an expressive device, to set a tempo (Huntington 260). "It is typical of Stapledon to use long participles or clauses to slow the rhythm, and to use imperatives, inversion, two-part cause and effect sentences, and periodic sentences to elevate the tone" (Smith, "Olaf Stapledon" 11). Patrick McCarthy has written of this novel that Stapledon "establishes temporal perspective by viewing events in rapid succession, watching only the highlights" (246). Crossley mentions that "Naomi Mitchison, who read several of Stapledon's novels in draft, regularly commented on the descriptive surprises and innovative rhythms in his fiction" ("Olaf Stapledon and the Idea of Science Fiction" 28). Huntington describes the approach to the end of the novel as "the final *rallentando*" during which the narrator's point of view becomes clear, through a gradual slowing down (263).

Star Maker is a history of our universe and other universes. Crossley points out that "The two billion-year history of the human race—the subject of the earlier book [*Last and First Men*]—gets just half a paragraph in *Star Maker*. Never before had humanity been so definitively marginalized in a work of fiction" (*Olaf Stapledon: Speaking for the Future* 230-231). The word music first appears in the context of a world without human music, where Stapledon describes the ears of the "Other Men": "Music, such as we know, never developed in this world" (*Star Maker* 34). Rhythm is mentioned several times,

notably as a mode of communication among the Nautiloids; as a tidal pattern dividing the life activities of composite beings called "bird-clouds;" and as the physical rhythm that enables the Cepheid variable stars "to alternate mentally between fervor and quietism" (200). Furthermore, Stapledon's discussion of the nebulae as beings presents them as having a slow "life-tempo," trying to reach maturity while drifting apart "to face the mystery of existence in absolute solitude" (216-217). And as the Star Maker is revealed near the end of the book, the first cosmos created is "his toy cosmos, a temporal rhythm, as it were of sound and silence" (236).

The Neptunian narrator of *Last Men in London*, who is the same narrator of *Last and First Men*, describes a youthful time, full of telepathic verse: "Somewhat as auditory verse uses sound, this most subtle of all the arts uses our direct sensitivity to ethereal vibrations for the evocations of rhythms and patterns of sensory images and ideas" (26). The protagonist is a young English soldier in the First World War whose mind is inhabited by the Neptunian. In describing the co-existence of their two minds, the Neptunian says "Thus the two of us together were like two different musical instruments playing against one another in two different tempos to produce a single intricacy of rhythm" (265). This *Bildungsroman* was published in 1932, yet the statement just cited is remarkably close to the rhythmic design of *String Quartet No. 2*, by the American composer Elliott Carter: "So that contrasts of tempi and polyrhythmic textures will stand out clearly, all indications of tempi and relationships of note values must be observed quite strictly in this work. Within this fairly strict observance of tempi, each instrument must for the most part maintain a slightly different character of playing from the others" (Carter ii). This resemblance is striking, considering that the Carter quartet was awarded both the Pulitzer Prize for Music and the New York Music Critics Circle Award in 1960, and the UNESCO First Prize in 1961. While one small facet of Stapledon's thoughts on rhythm served to establish a fictional relationship between a human being and an extra-terrestrial, an analogous idea for a musical composition came to appear in a landmark work by a major American composer some three decades later.

In tandem with Stapledon's metaphoric use of rhythm are his graceful references to dance and his many associations of dance with the finer side of life forms. Some of these instances are the "wonderfully beautiful cloud dances" that were a form of expression for the Martians in *Last and First Men* (166); the sparkling descriptions of stars as waltzing pairs, a star's life as a life of the dance, the mature star's behavior as a "ritual of the stellar dance" and "galactic dance," and "the dance pattern of the galaxy," (*Star Maker* 198-199)—all of which, taken together, disseminate patterns of "canons of the dance" in *Star Maker* (198-199); and the motions of nebulae compared to the pirouetting of a dancer in *Nebula Maker* (29), with dances of the universe as instantiations

of ecstasy. In one of the *Four Encounters*, Stapledon mused that the columns of a cathedral were "joined in their upstretched hands like dancers waiting for music" ("A Christian" 3).

References to pitch appear in several of Stapledon's novels and show he had more than a passing familiarity with melody, tonality, scales, register, harmony, interval, and, perhaps, dodecaphonic music. An early cosmos created by the Star Maker is called "a rich sequence of qualities diverse in pitch and intensity. With this toy the infant Star Maker played delightedly, inventing an infinite wealth of melody and counterpoint" (*Star Maker* 237). In *Last Men in London* (12) Stapledon refers to the "uncouth syllables" and "archaic melody" of "Old Man River," which is sung by a man and woman on Neptune as they face the final moments of the solar system (Crossley, *Olaf Stapledon: Speaking for the Future* 172). Scruton has written of melody that "The encapsulation of musical movement in melodic events, and with structural episodes heard as 'stations along the way', is the most important source of thematic organization in classical music" (59). Stapledon goes so far as to compare melody with biography: "I perceived the whole biography of my generation, nay of my species, as you perceive a melody, in flux yet all of it 'now'" (*Last Men in London* 19).

Melody in nature, expressed in bird song, was of great interest to Stapledon. In a letter to Agnes, dated 25 May 1918, he described a bird's song he heard while walking in the woods in France. The melody consisted of six notes and was highly developed: "So human and musical was this phrase that I thought at first it must be a man whistling. But the sound was too rich for any man's lips.... And it was a phrase that might very well have come out of Beethoven's mind, so I thought" (Crossley, *Talking* 303). His remarks bring to mind one of the many comments on the topic made by the twentieth century French composer Olivier Messiaen: "It is probable that in the artistic hierarchy birds are the greatest musicians existing on earth" (Samuel 51). Charles Darwin wrote of bird song in *The Origin of Species* and connected it to his theory of the origin of music. The philosopher Peter Kivy notes that "It was the consideration of the evolution of man and his mental faculties that led Darwin to extrapolate from the music of birds to the music of men" (43). Stapledon incorporated his admiration of birds in "The Flying Men" chapter of *Last and First Men*, where humans evolved into bird-like creatures living on the planet Venus. Their social order was purely aesthetic: "Of the arts, music, spoken lyric and epic verse, and the supreme art of winged dance, were constantly practiced" (282). They lived to fly high in the atmosphere and died of melancholia if on the ground too long. And they sang: "Companies, circling together, would be discussing matters social or aesthetic; others would be singing together, or listening to recitative epic verse" (284).

Two of Stapledon's novels—*Odd John: A Story Between Jest and Earnest* (1935), and *Sirius: A Fantasy of Love and Discord* (1944)—are similar in their

focus on the super-human faculties of their protagonists; music plays a significant role in each. *Odd John* concerns the relationship between a mutated super-individual and a group of super-individuals in relation to the rest of humanity. Odd John's hands might suggest they were formed for playing instruments suited to atonal or dodecaphonic music: "he would be playing a pipe, a sort of recorder, but with the octave very oddly divided. I discovered that each of his hands had *five* fingers and a thumb. Even so, I couldn't make out how he managed all the extra notes. The kind of music he played was extraordinarily fascinating to me" (157). Later in the novel, John issues a diatribe against humanity in which he comments on repetition, something eschewed in dodecaphonic music. "And we know, you must remember, that *Homo sapiens* has little more to contribute to the music of this planet, nothing in fact but vain repetition. It is time for finer instruments to take up the theme" (217). There is also a Tibetan character called Tsomotre who plays "a sort of harpsichord, tuned to the strange intervals which the islanders enjoyed" (244). The music described is reminiscent of the "Entrückung" movement from Arnold Schoenberg's *Second String Quartet*, op. 10 (composed 1907—1908), which features a soprano voice part for the text of Stefan George's poem of the same name. The famous first line—"Ich fühle luft von anderem Planeten" (Schoenberg 48), or, "I feel the air of another planet"—is similar, both in mood and in character, to the exotic music found on Odd John's island. Schoenberg wrote, in his essay "How One Becomes Lonely," about his thoughts after setting Stefan George's poetry to music: "New sounds were produced, a new kind of melody appeared, a new approach to expression to moods and characters was discovered" (Stein 50). Schoenberg's setting of the poem also evokes the cosmic explorations portrayed in *Star Maker*. The musicologist Judith Ryan has noted "The C# major chord that concludes Schoenberg's piece suggests a radiant union of subject and cosmos beyond the sphere of human speech" (89).

Sirius, the ingenious dog who interacts with humankind, finds human music excruciating but learns about it (how humans compose, how they listen) as a way of understanding human behavior. With the help of his female human companion, Plaxy, he becomes interested in the classical music of Western civilization and uses his musical knowledge to signal ideas. This becomes such a prominent feature of the dog's intellectual abilities that Cambridge "psychologists and musicians studied his musical powers" (*Sirius* 105). As Sirius struggles to express his vision for humankind, he wonders whether or not he might be a composer and frames the thought in his own mind this way: "Sirius, the unique canine composer, not only changed the whole character of human music, importing into it something of the dog's finer auditory sensibility; he also, in his own incomparable creations, expressed the fundamental identity-in-diversity of all spirits, of whatever species, canine, human or super-human"

(115). Once he becomes a composer, his use of scales includes "the quarter-tone and even the eighth-of-a-tone. Sometimes in his purely canine mood, his melodies divided the octave in a quite different manner from any human musical mode" (40). The culmination of his musical brilliance is described in a scene where Sirius is invited to sing at a religious service in a Methodist chapel:

This was to be the beginning of his message to the human species. He would sing them something of his own composition. It must be something intelligible to human ears, and indeed a good proportion of this simple congregation. It must be something which would help them to feel again the essential truth in their own religion, and the unimportance of its mythology. (133)

Harmony is often referenced obliquely throughout Stapledon's fiction, as *cosmical music* or *music of the spheres*. Stapledon approaches harmony not only in the philosophical sense of harmonious relationships between planets and galaxies in the universe, but also in the structural way of moving from one domain to another. (Surprisingly, there is no appearance of the term *music of the spheres* in *Star Maker*, his most famous work; there is just this one indirect reference: "Philosophy, generally rather Pythagorean, appeared for the first time in a cosmos of this 'musical kind'" [239].) Stapledon refers to individuals trying to comprehend "the spiritual music of the cosmos" in his novella *The Flames* (35). In the novel *A Man Divided*, the protagonist, Victor, writes a profound letter in which he refers to cosmical music: "My wish is wholly for life, life eternal, not just for my own little individuality, which is essentially and rightly ephemeral, but for the spirit that is the perennial and cosmic music inherent in the lives of all ephemeral individuals" (182). Life itself throughout the universe is characterized as music of the spheres in *Four Encounters*: "This something, I told myself, this spirit, is indeed the music of the spheres, for which we are all lowly instruments and players. Whether this music is only to be appreciated gropingly by the players themselves, or whether it is for the discerning joy of some cosmical artist, or perhaps in some incomprehensible way for the very music itself, we cannot know" (18). *Last Men in London* contains a passage that links music of the spheres with the self-destructive nature of humankind, calling the behavior "a theme required in the strange music of the spheres" (4). As the protagonist Paul dies, he experiences the illumination of his soul. Stapledon writes that "In this high music of the spheres, even the heartless betrayals, the mean insufficiencies of will, common to all musical instruments, unwittingly contribute by their very foulness to the intolerable, the inhuman, beauty of the music" (249). Robert Branham notes "Stapledon's novels provide a record of the attempts by humans and other sentient beings to hear the music of the spheres and glimpse its composer" (250). Smith, in his

study of Stapledon's manuscript of *Last and First Men*, comments that "[Stapledon's] medium of spherical music includes not merely the external aspects of things ... but also the inner life of all minds" ("The Manuscript" 270). Stapledon defined and summarized his own vision of harmony and music of the spheres in two nearby passages from *Last and First Men*. His definition reads: "The music of the spheres is unlike other music not only in respect of its richness, but also in the nature of its medium. It is a music not merely of sounds but of souls. Each of its minor themes, each of its chords, each single tone of it, each tremor of each tone, is in its own degree more than a mere passive factor in the music; it is a listener, and also a creator" (336-337). His vision goes much further: "Throughout all his existence man has been striving to hear the music of the spheres, and has seemed to himself once and again to catch some phrase of it, or even a hint of the whole form of it. Yet he can never be sure that he has truly heard it, or even that there is any such perfect music at all to be heard. Inevitably so, for if it exists, it is not for him in his littleness" (354-355). Alex Aronson, in his book *Music and the Novel*, offers a definition of the musical experience that comports with Stapledon's vision: "[the musical experience is] the nearest approach to perfection in man's perception of the beautiful, a manifestation of some divine essence, the very rhythm of life itself echoing what the ancients called the universal music of the spheres" (126).

Musical form as shape and contour in space and time plays a significant role in the structural relationships between the configurations of Stapledon's worlds and universes. Worlds change at different moments to fashion new, hidden relationships with elements orchestrated into new universes while cosmic schemes and magnitude become gestures of infinity. When Stapledon writes about civilizations that are both human and extra-terrestrial, as in *Star Maker*, when the species, as they evolve, plan and design their histories and futures, outcomes are sometimes determined by what happens in nature, through organic forces and accidents. The narrator of *Star Maker* describes the Nautiloids as a civilization of marine organisms on an aqueous planet, who have membranes of parchment-like sails and whose brains use magnetic sensitivity to enable them to navigate the surfaces of shallow oceans. "It may seem strange that a species of this kind should have developed human intelligence. In more than one world of this type, however, a number of accidents combined to produce this result" (*Star Maker* 81). As in my earlier comparison of a Stapledonian concept (concerning rhythm) to a work by the American composer Elliott Carter, here there is a parallel with the compositional philosophy of the French composer-conductor Pierre Boulez. In the book *Dialogues with Boulez*, the composer offers the following comments on organic forces and accidents in relation to his musical philosophy: "I would say more than just intuition, organic development is a consequence of intuition, which is a combination of

intuition and order" (Di Pietro 37). "You have a stream in flux, but within this stream many things happen which are absolutely unforeseeable. Certainly you have a goal" (Di Pietro 98). "If I build a work, I accept the accidents, and I think that in life it is exactly the same" (Di Pietro 98). "For me the fundamental fact of life is deterministic with a lot of aleatoric events that one sorts through" (Di Pietro 98).

In his note on magnitude at the end of *Star Maker*, Stapledon talks of immensity, perspective, and smallness as scales that could include or be the work of tiny life forms: "Things are of course only large and small in relation to one another. To say that a cosmos is large is only to say that, in relation to it, some of its constituents are small" (265). One cosmos in the novel consists of beings at the molecular level who have memories and longings, and "whose physical centres of power, which men conceive vaguely as electrons, protons, and the rest, were at first coincident with one another" (225). Stephen Wolfram provides a contemporary view in a note on physics as intelligence: "From the point of view of traditional thinking about intelligence in the universe it might seem like an extremely bizarre possibility that perhaps intelligence could exist at a very small scale, and in effect have spread throughout the universe, building as an artifact everything we see" (1192).

Stapledon's cosmography portrays the *Star Maker's* ultimate cosmos as symphonic music and, in the text, characterizes the metaphor as one of degree: "It was like the last movement of a symphony, which may embrace, by the significance of its themes, the essence of its earlier movements; and far more besides" (*Star Maker* 253). The narrator of the novel strains to capture the essence of the ultimate cosmos which embodies the full range of human emotion: "But as I strove to hear more inwardly into that music of concrete spirits in countless worlds, I caught echoes not merely of joys unspeakable, but of griefs inconsolable" (254). Other passages in Stapledon's writings pertain to contour with musical metaphor as a vehicle. *Last Men in London* describes the extinction of humankind as the "cessation of one brief tremulous theme in the great music of the cosmos" (2). In a passage about form in art, Stapledon refers to "those most significant of sensuous forms that artists alone create; the exciting vision that painters present to us, the innovations of sound that musicians deploy" (*The Opening of the Eyes* 77). Eric Prieto, in his book *Listening In: Music, Mind, and the Modernist Narrative* characterizes a use of musical metaphor (in discussing a different writer) "to lead into another metaphorical register, a kind of cosmic or interplanetary metaphor" (180). That is precisely what Stapledon achieves in his passages, but with lushness comparable to the rich chromatic alterations that move harmonies from one tonal domain to another.

In *Saints and Revolutionaries*, one of Stapledon's non-fiction books, he defines "creative capacity" as "the production of an intellectual theory which reorgan-

izes understanding and opens new vistas before the mind's eye" (82) The definition is directly relevant to this examination of musical metaphor in his fiction, and to Stapledon's notes on art. Stapledon's hand-written lecture notes for "Appreciation of Technique in Art" refer to the composer's technique as "primarily skilled perception of sound-patterns, (knowing what sound can do)" and the poet's technique as including "skilled manipulation of complex ideas, and complex emotional processes" (4). His notes offer evidence that he was aware of the operations that can occur in a composer's mind — consciously or not — when music is being composed. He states (in the lecture notes) music "is a vision of — something to be sung, or played on instruments" (62). Another thought on music composition appears in *Star Maker*: "In human music particular themes may seem to approach or retreat, owing to variations of loudness and timbre" (239). Or this observation, from *Last and First Men*: "Actual music is a pattern of intertwining themes which evolve and die; and these again are woven of simpler members, which again are spun of chords and unitary tones" (336). Stapledon combined his creative ideas on music and poetry when he wrote the lyrics to the song "A Night Sound." The music was composed by his second cousin, Hayward A. Scott, and is scored for low voice and piano. The song was published by West & Co. (London) in 1915. The lyrics contain several words — moon, meteor, eternity — that offer a glimpse of the cosmic imagery that would come later on in Stapledon's major writings.

Conceptions of time that echo ruminations about musical time reverberate throughout Stapledon's fiction. Stapledonian time unfolds almost as a parallel universe to musical time, the two converging at observable points to become pathways in a cosmic system. Theodor Adorno wrote in his 1953 essay "On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music" that distinctions between time in music and real time have been made: "people have tried to spin out the essence of music from the observation that musical space and musical time constitute a separate continuum that is absolutely distinct from empirical space and empirical time" (142). The *Star Maker's* musical cosmoses find temporal realization through creative expression, collocated as great works of art. Leonard W. Doob, in his *Patterning of Time*, gives the following statement on great art and cosmic query:

For great art raises cosmic questions concerning man's fate and the basic problems of his existence and then provides answers which manage, if only slightly, to transcend the artist's own prejudices as a human being living in a particular age. Pure music (always the baffling art), divorced utterly from verse and dance, makes its contribution too, I think, by transforming the listener — and before him the performer — into an individual who fleetingly can undergo such meaningful, liberating experiences. (387)

Stapledon describes it this way: "each of his [the Star Maker's] works, each cosmos, was itself gifted with its own particular time, in such a manner that the whole sequence of events within any single cosmos could be viewed by the Star Maker not only from within the cosmical time itself but also externally, from the time proper to his own life, with all the cosmical epochs co-existing together" (*Star Maker* 233). Time expressed as a circle appears as a musical cosmos created by the Star Maker: "He knotted the final event temporally to the beginning, so that the cosmical time formed an endless circlet" (237). This particular Stapledonian cosmos may have been inspired by Johannes Kepler's *The Harmony of the World*. A description of Kepler's circular model is directly relevant here: "He [Kepler] grounds his analogy between celestial and sublunar counterpoints on a fourfold circular model: the orbit of the planets, the rotation of polyphonic voices, the geometric properties of a circle, and the operations of the soul, which is also conceived as a circle" (Spitzer 145). Stapledon also emphasized time as the synchronizing interface of the Star Maker's works: "In nearly all of the Star Maker's works ... time was a more fundamental attribute than space" (239). And, in what is perhaps a fusion of musical time with Stapledon's own conceptions of time, this reference to music: "In his maturity the Star Maker conceived many strange forms of time" (251). The ideas about time as articulated in Stapledon's prose and his use of musical metaphor are relationally significant: They transfer the totality of musical metaphor to the sphere of time relations by comprising a continuum punctuated by locations in time — intervals that are large gestural shapes, some juxtapositional, some developmental, but all of them expansive. His *multiverse* is the simultaneous unfolding of many complexes of time divisions expressed as metaphors of music. The Star Maker hears the complete cosmogony — the instantaneous music of his creations and the relationships embedded in them — as he composes his infinite symphony.

Stapledon's compositional use of musical metaphor, both as background pillar and surface ornamentation, provides networks and layers of scaffolding from the general to the particular. Both *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker* were published with a series of time scales to represent visually the stunning temporal magnitudes that these novels cover in their narratives. Furthermore, all of these silhouettes of time can be overlaid with luminosities about musical time that both parallel Stapledon's worlds and unveil his music of infinity. Philip Alperson remarks that "A sequence of musical events is, in fact, composable and repeatable; a sequence of events in the natural world is, to our knowledge, not" (413). While the Star Maker's cosmoses or universes may be fictional, their disposition resembles musical time in that they are created in a temporal sequence—they are works composed in time. One of the Star Maker's complex creations is comprised of "many distinct temporal dimensions and distinct histories" with "an infinity of distinct universes exfoliated from every moment

of every temporal sequence in this cosmos" (*Star Maker* 252). The French poet and novelist Pierre Jean Jouve, in "La musique et l'état mystique," expressed a reflective thought about musical time, reminiscent of Stapledon's conceptions: "Through Music, time is absorbed into religious expectation, since the instant is immediately open to eternity" (Godwin 269).

Last and First Men ends with the extinction of humankind. Stapledon concludes his novel with the musical metaphor that became a talisman: "But one thing is certain. Man himself, at the very least, is music, a brave theme that makes music also of its vast accompaniment, its matrix of storms and stars.... For we shall make after all a fair conclusion to this brief music that is man" (355). Stapledon varied the wording in some of his other writings, but the phrase was essentially the same. Two examples are "the living music that is man" (*Old Man in New World* 35) and "the solemn music that is man" (*The Opening of the Eyes* 59). The splendid use of musical metaphor in the fiction of Olaf Stapledon is the compositional technique that connects Stapledon's conceptions of music with life itself, that provides both a setting and a source for his spiritual and ethical beliefs, and that enables his vision to be *heard* as well as seen, across the vastness of time and space, in past and future music.

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